

Elder and Special Needs Law Journal



A publication of the Elder Law and Special Needs Section
of the New York State Bar Association

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- Mental Health and Safety Monitoring: Personal Care Services for Elders with Dementia
- Ethical Obligations in a Personal Injury Action with a Medicare Set Aside Account
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Member Spotlight: Felicia Pasculli

Interview by Katy Carpenter

Q Where are you from?

A I like to think Heaven, (or at least that's what I tell my kids!) I am from Astoria, Queens – it's trendy now, not so much back then. The entire maternal side of my family lived there also, so we had a community within a community.

Q What brought you to Long Island?

A We chose Long Island because we like to be near the water and, at the time, a house there was more affordable.

Q Tell me about your family.

A Where to begin ... I grew up in a working-class family where I was the first to go to college. I am the oldest of three kids. My dad was very smart, he graduated high school at 16 but it was difficult to find a well-paying job, so he also started boxing – he was fearless – he even boxed while serving during World War II. Won the Inter-City Golden Gloves at 19. My mom was from a more comfortable but insulated background. She raised us but when it was time for me to go to high school, she went to work so they could afford to send me to a private high school.



My parents kept me on a short leash which at times I chafed at. I was subjected to a double standard. I married young and had three children (I now have three grandchildren). I first worked as an editor, but I've always been an advocate.

Q Have you had any turning points in your life?

A Many! My path to law school was atypical. I was 38 when my dad became sick and his capacity started declining. He suffered from brain trauma and was at the VA medical center at Northport, NY. We had been told that a new nursing home was to be built and about 80 long-standing patients transferred there. While visiting one day, a social worker who was a Vietnam veteran confided that the VA was changing course and was going to open the facility for rehab only and summarily discharge the men. Startled, I asked what he wanted me to do. I'll never forget his response. He said, "I don't know but I figure you'll come up with something." He was right. I caused a ruckus alerting the families, veterans' organizations, LI's congressional delegation, and *Newsday*. A Congressional subcommittee was held at the Northport VA and over 900 people attended. We made the cover of *Newsday* and the VA backed down.

At that point, I believed being a lawyer would increase my credibility and value as an advocate, so I went to CUNY at Queens College Law School four days a week. I chose that school because there was a daycare center for my youngest, who was two at the time.

Q Now it's understandable how you came about practicing in the areas of elder law and veterans law.

A It was a natural combination for me. Within a year, I started my own practice. I think that was possible due to my life experiences and public exposure. It's difficult making a living solely from veterans law and if I were independently wealthy, it's all I would do because I believe it's God's work. At least I can get the word out to other practitioners to make sure they know about veterans' benefits in order to fully service their clients.

Q Tell me about a project or accomplishment that you consider to be the most significant in your career.

A I am one of the founders of the Long Island Alzheimer's Foundation, established in 1988. At the time, there was no central source of information regarding services for those suffering from dementia. We created a resource manual listing social workers, doctors, attorneys, etc. that specialized in treating Alzheimer's or assisting their families. We also developed innovative programs.

Q What did you want to be when you were 13?

A Writing was my first love, but things were very different back then and I didn't believe I could make a living as a writer. Women were usually encouraged to become nurses or teachers.

Currently, I am writing a screenplay about a boxer that my dad knew. I'm taking screenwriting classes in Manhattan, which has been great for guidance and feedback. We have a fabulous teacher and we even have a celebrity in the group, who shall remain nameless.

Q Do you have any advice for young attorneys?

A I would recommend studying something of interest in college, not pre-law or political science. Then I would try to scare them – don't do it unless you're strong and have a passion for advocacy. There will be challenging days you will need to survive. Law is not for the faint of heart. However, it gives you the opportunity to truly effect change, and that's very fulfilling.

Q Is there anything else you want people to know about you?

A People know too much about me. My filters are dropping at an alarming rate, but I think in some ways it makes me a more effective advocate. I strongly believe in health care for all and income equality and I am politically involved in advocating for both. I want everyone to be taken care of; our country has the money to do it but needs the political will.

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